DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 166 CS 210 580

AUTHOR Asahina, Roberta R.
TITLE The 15-Second Television Commercial: A Study of Executive Perception.
PUB DATE Mar 87
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (70th, San Antonio, TX, August 1-4, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; Mass Media Effects; Media Research; *Motivation Techniques; *Persuasive Discourse; Recall (Psychology); Salesmanship; *Television Commercials; *Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS Advertising Agencies; *Advertising Effectiveness; Audience Response

ABSTRACT

An exploratory study examined the perceptions of creative directors and broadcast production managers in advertising agencies regarding the perceived effects of the 15-second commercial upon creative formats and production techniques. A sample of 600 randomly selected advertising executives and managers were surveyed using a 55-item mailed questionnaire; from this sample 233 usable reponses were received. A majority of the respondents had more than 15 years experience in advertising, as well as professional experience with the 15-second commercial spot. When asked to rank the most effective formats for the 15-second spot, respondents selected (1) humorous, (2) spokesperson, (3) vignette, (4) "other," and (5) storyline. Results indicated that, with use of shorter commercials, recall becomes the most important function, and the recall of brand name became more important than brand image. Findings also indicated that the shorter television commercial format demanded more simple, single-minded messages and creative approaches. Advertisements emphasizing key benefit, action focused on one key point, and simple structural formats such as spokesperson, demonstration, and product-alone spots should be used more than spots emphasizing lifestyle, image, or sensory appeals. Enhanced production techniques should accompany this need for simple, single-minded messages, in line with the increased importance of recall. (Tables of data and footnotes are included, and selected comments from respondents are appended.) (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED283166

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

THE 15-SECOND TELEVISION COMMERCIAL:

A STUDY OF EXECUTIVE PERCEPTION

By

Dr. Roberta R. Asahina
Associate Professor

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Roberta A. Asahina

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Department of Journalism
California State University, Fresno
Fresno, California 93740-0010

March, 1987

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS 210580

THE 15-SECOND TELEVISION COMMERCIAL: A STUDY OF EXECUTIVE PERCEPTION

ABSTRACT

A statistical analysis explores advertising executives' perceptions regarding perceived effects of the 15-second television commercial upon creative formats and production techniques. Creative directors and broadcast production managers in ten advertising markets are surveyed to determine perceived impact of the 15-second television commercial upon creative development and production, as well as perceptions regarding the most important functions of the shorter format, key areas of emphasis, techniques for capturing audience attention and breaking clutter, effective structural formats, and development of messages for the 15-second time slot.

Dr. Roberta R. Asahina
Associate Professor
Department of Journalism
California State University, Fresno
Fresno, California 93740-0010
209-294-2087

In 1986, television networks opened up sales for the 15-second stand-alone television commercial. Prior to this, advertisers experimented with split thirties following the U.S. District Court ruling in 1982 nullifying NAB codes restricting the number and scheduling of commercials. In 1982, Alberto-Culver pioneered split-thirties, using a single 30-second spot to broadcast two separate 15-second messages. Gillette, Coca-Cola, Warner-Lambert, Nabisco, and others followed. The decision to use split-thirties was easy; advertisers got twice as many messages for the same media dollar.

In 1985, :15s represented 9% of network sales; in 1986, 20%. In March, 1987, Advertising Age reported, "One-third of all network TV commercials during January were 15-second spots, up 10% over usual levels last summer."[1] Primetime use of :15s has nearly doubled since summer of 1986; and, in daytime, :15s have increased to about 35% of all daypart commercials. A report by J. Walter Thompson predicts that by 1990, half of all network ads will be :15s.[2] Some industry analysts predict that :15s may represent as much as 75% of network television advertising by the year 1990.[3]

Two factors have effected this widespread use of :15s: proven message effectiveness of the 15-second commercial and cheaper rates. A study by ABC/J. Walter Thompson, for example, indicates the 15-second spot is as much as 80% effective as a 30-second commercial.[4] Furthermore, network costs for a 15-second commercial are half that of a :30, making the use of :15s extremely cost effective.

Research to date concerning the 15-second television commercial generally focuses on three themes: the effects of increasing clutter, the appropriate use of :15s in a media plan, and some industry commentary on the impact upon creative development.[5]

All three concerns relate to the strong possibility twice as many messages may make up a single break; in fact, perhaps as many as eight 15-second spots could make up a commercial pod. The widespread use of :15s and the threat of twice as many messages in an already cluttered commercial environment, suggests a substantial impact upon creative formats and production techniques as advertisers compete for audience attention.

As early as 1984, John O'Toole, then President of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, addressed the concern for creative impact:

> While agency managers ponder how split thirties will alter the effectiveness of television as a medium, the copywriters and art directors who work for them have a much different concern; how the new format will affect television commercials themselves. To these people a television commercial is not merely a piece of time and a share of audience but a meticulously conceived and produced way of persuading someone to try a certain product or service. Achieving all this in fifteen seconds they say, is hardly a piece of cake.[6]

The purpose of this study is to determine the executive perceptions of creative directors and broadcast production managers regarding perceived effects of the 15-second television commercial upon creative formats and production techniques.

METHODS:

A random sample of 600creative directors and broadcast production managers in America's top ten advertising markets were surveyed using a 55-item questionnaire. The sample was selected from full-service advertising agencies listed in the Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies.

The instrument for study was a mailed survey consisting of 55 items, some questions having multiple parts requesting data on the executive's participation with the 15-second television commercial, the percentage of creative time spent with :15s, :30s, and :60s, the executive's experience in the advertising industry, and a ranking by category of the subject's advertising firm's most important accounts. Also included were questions related to the subject's experience with the transition from 60-second to 30-second spots, as well as the executive's ranking of the most effective formats for :15s, :30s, and :60s. Subjects were asked questions related to percieved impact of the 15-second television commercial upon production techniques, costs, and time necessary for production. Finally, a Likert scale asked subjects to respond to twenty-five statements relevant to perceived effects of the 15-second spot on creative format and production techniques. Respondents were asked their opinions from strongly agree to strongly

disagree.

The survey forms were mailed to the respective creative directors and broadcast production managers with an attached cover letter explaining the prupose of the study. 256 questionnaires were returned. The study results are based upon the 233 usable responses. The returned questionnaires were coded for computer analysis to provide descriptive data on executive perceptions; a standard statistical package, SPSS was used. Frequency counts were generated for all responses and a factors analysis was prepared for the 25 opinion statements.

RESULTS:

SAMPLE: The largest group of respondents are from New York (25.8%), the second largest group from Los Angeles (23.3%), followed by Chicago (13.3%), Detroit (11.2%), Dallas/Fort Worth (9.0%) and San Francisco (8.2%). Cleveland, Boston,Philadelphia, and Washington D. C. represent a total of 9.5% of the study's respondents. These subjects appear to have a substantial number of years in the advertising industry. In fact, 71% of the group have had fifteen or more years experience. The largest group of respondents (25.4%) indicate 20 to 25 years of advertising experience, the next largest group (24.1%) indicate 15 to 20 years. One fourth of the group have had from five to 15 years experience. The subjects ranked the most important accounts their firms advertise. This ranking placed food-related products first, services second, "other" (a category not listed on the questionnaire) third, automobiles fourth, followed by beverages and business equipment. Children-related products and appliance accounts are the least represented accounts these creative executives produce commercials for.

EXPERIENCE WITH THE 15-SECOND TELEVISION COMMERCIAL: 72% of the study's respondents indicate experience with the 15-second commercial. Chart I shows the percentage of creative time subjects spend with the 15-second spot and creative time percentages of longer formats. Respondents were asked to rank the most effective formats for the 15-second commercial as well as the 30-second, and 60-second or longer spot. Chart II demonstrates the most effective formats for the 15-second commercial are first, humorous; second, spokesperson; third, vignette;

CHART I

AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WORKING WITH 15-SECOND SPOTS COMPARED TO LONGER FORMATS

Percentage of Time Spent on Spots	:15s	:30s	:60s
0 to 5% of creative time	34.6%	1.7%	68.3%
5 to 10% of creative time	34.1%	2.6%	15.9%
10 to 25% of creative time	19.5%	2.2%	7.0%
25 to 50% of creative time	11.4%	14.8%	4.8%
50 to 75% of creative time	.5%	28.8%	1.8%
75 to 100% of creative time	.9%	49.8%	2.2%

NB: Three separate multiple-parts questions were asked. Therefore, columns should be read vertically.

and fourth, "other" (generally indicating "demonstration"); and fifth, storyline. Subjects also ranked the least effective formats for the 15-second commercial: storyline, first; vignette, second; animated third; spokesperson, fourth; and "other" (generally indicating "demonstration"), fifth. In comparison, subjects also ranked the most effective formats for the 30-second and the 60-second television spot. Chart II demonstrates those results.

EXPERIENCE WITH CREATIVE TRANSITIONS: 61% of the study's participants indicate they were writing and producing spots when television commercials were predominantly 60 seconds. 39% said they did not participate in this "era." 75% of the study's respondents participated in the transition from predominantly 60-second spots to 30-second spots. 59% agreed the transition was easy; 39% said it was difficult, and some did not answer the question. Appendix I lists selected comments regarding the transition from 60-second to 30-second television commercials.

Regarding the transition from 30-second to 15-second spots, 76% of the respondents indicate creative formats and production techniques will be effected--especially with the possibility of twice as many messages in a single break. Further, 96% of these creative directors and production managers indicate the 15-second commercial will not save time to produce; 48% indicate the short spot will not save money in production costs; and 97% indicate a short spot will not save time in the "chain of approval" required to get a spot on the air.

PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF THE 15-SECOND TELEVISION COMMERCIAL ON MESSAGE FORMAT AND PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES: Respondents indicate recall will be the most important function of the commercial. Furthermore, recall of brand name will be more important than brand image. Related to this, recall of brand name will be more important than information. However, key benefits will continue to be important. Respondents indicate key benefits will be more important than product image. Action will be focused on one key point. Products will have more focus than users. Target appeals will have more importance than sensory appeals. Words will be used sparingly, but not sacrificed for visual appeals. Voice-overs will not be used less often.

CHART II

MOST EFFECTIVE FORMATS FOR VARIOUS-LENGTHS TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

RANKING	60-Second	30-Second	15-Second
First	Storyline	Humorous	Humorous
Second	Humorous	Storyline	Spokesperson
Third	Vignette	Vignette	Vignette
Fourth	Other	Spokesperson	Other
Fifth	Spokesperson	Other	Storyline

NB: Respondents generally noted "demonstration" for Other

Lifestyle commercials will be replaced by spokesperson or product-alone spots. Spokesperson and demonstration commercials will not be replaced by product-alone spots. Celebrities as spokespersons will be used less often. Entertainment values will have more importance than information. New formats will develop to accomodate the 15-second spot. Commercials will not resemble price-product spots, nor will they resemble MTV. Visual and sound techniques will develop to grab attention and break clutter. But, changes in formats will not mean more simple production techniques. Cuts will not be shorter and shorter. Music will be more important than sound effects. Jingles will continue to be used but less often. See Chart III.

Beyond the frequency analysis, raw data from the study was analyzed by a factors analysis using SPSS subprogram L factor. The factors derived from this analysis were reinterpreted for constancy of comparison using a varimax rotated factor matrix after rotation with Kaiser normalization. Three factors showed significant loadings; the interpretation of these three follows: (1) Respondents indicated disagreement with the statements information not entertainment will be most important. Also, the subjects disagreed with the statements 15-second commercials will resemble price-product spots, and the statement commercials will resemble MTV. Respondents also indicate disagreement with the statements voice-overs will be used sparingly and target appeals will be dropped for sensory appeals. The respondents disagreed with the statement image will be more important than key benefit. (2) Respondents agree with the statement key benefits will continue to be important and the statement action will be focused on one key point. (3) The respondents indicate visual and sound techniques will develop to grab attention and break clutter. Related to the factors analysis, it appears creative directors and production managers predict several significant themes of direction for the 15-second television commercial: action will be focused on one key point, key benefits will continue to be important, that these key benefits will be more important than image, and these spots will not resemble price-product spots or MTV. Visual and sound techniques are predicted to develop to grab attention and break clutter, however, target appeals will be more important than sensory appeals per se. Information values will not be more important than

CHART III

FREQUENCY OF RESPONSE TO OPINION STATEMENTS
RELATED TO PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF THE 15-SECOND TELEVISION SPOT

	Agree	Disagree
Recall of brand name will be more important than brand image:	67.4%	29.2%
Key benefits will continue to be important:	84.4%	11.6%
Target appeals will be dropped for sensory appeals:	24.5%	66.5%
Recall of brand name will be more important than information:	64.8%	32.2%
Words will be used sparingly:	74.7%	23.6%
Words will be sacrificed for visual appeals:	46.8%	49.0%
Sounds effects will be more important than music:	77.7%	17.1%
Jingles will be used less:	50.3%	45.5%
Products will have more focus than users:	55.0%	36.0%
Demonstrations will be sacrificed for product-alone spots:	32.6%	62.8%
Spokespersons will be sacrificed for product-alone spots:	22.7%	73.0%
Lifestyle commercials will be replaced by spokesperson or product-alone spots:	56.7%	39.9%
Image will be more important than key benefits:	22.3%	72.2%
Voice-overs will be used sparingly:	14.2%	82.4%
Recall will be the most important function of the commercial:	67.0%	27.9%
Information, not entertainment will be more important:	42.0%	53.8%
Commercials will resemble price-product spots:	21.9%	73.4%
Commercials will resemble MTV:	18.4%	74.7%
New formats will develop to accomodate the 15-second spot:	75.5%	20.6%
Changes in formats will mean more simple production techniques:	29.2%	66.1%
Visual and sound techniques will develop for the 15-second spot which will grab attention and break clutter:	79.0%	15.1%
Celebrities as spokespersons will be used more often:	31.3%	62.6%
Cuts will get shorter and shorter:	38.6%	54.6%
Action will be focused on one key point:	89.3%	7.7%

NB: Where totals do not add to 100%, answers were missing.

entertainment values in the production of these spots. See Chart IV.

CONCLUSIONS:

It appears the shorter television commercial format will demand more simple, single-minded messages and creative approaches. Key benefit, action focused on one key point, and simple structural formats such as spokesperson, demonstration, and product-alone spots will be emphasized more than spots which emphasize lifestyle, image, or sensory appeals. Enhanced production techniques will accompany this need for simple, single-minded messages--especially since recall is the primary function of the 15-second spot, as indicated by this study's participants. Appendix II lists selected comments relevant to the overall effects of the 15-second television commercial on creative format and production techniques as offered in the "commentary" of the questionnaire.

FURTHER RESEARCH:

This study is fundamentally exploratory research related to predicted impact upon creative formats and production techniques. However, the results of the study suggest heuristic value: further hypothesis development for future research regarding the impact of the 15-second television commercial in actual practice.

CHART IV

FACTOR ANALYSIS OF FORMAT ITEMS

VARIMAX ROATED FACTOR MATRIX AFTER ROTATION WITH KAISER NORMALIZATION

FACTORS SHOWING SIGNIFICANT LOADING:

	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3
Var 031	.10662	.39781	.14059
Var 032	-.08758	.08484	.58000
Var 033	.56110	.03575	.02327
Var 034	.26519	.29806	.12905
Var 035	.20627	.07082	.31030
Var 036	.30434	.11611	.14930
Var 037	.40877	.26892	.04207
Var 038	.28600	.35188	.18267
Var 039	.12759	.37202	.18729
Var 040	.31490	.22723	.09063
Var 041	.36161	.13971	.21724
Var 042	.08531	.44820	.18349
Var 043	.66039	-.00593	.00712
Var 044	.61876	.27062	.16829
Var 045	.04301	.33841	.30528
Var 046	.17549	.48682	.00551
Var 047	-.05789	.56751	.18885
Var 048	.12257	.71332	.06612
Var 049	.54886	.17524	.16585
Var 050	.32677	.12583	.35467
Var 051	.15756	.08354	.38673
Var 052	.27385	.08299	.51089
Var 053	.37587	.32699	.31719
Var 054	.36586	.47439	.21308
Var 055	.17569	.11434	.65907

FOOTNOTES

1 Gay, Verne. "Fifteen Second Spots Fill One-Third of Net Ad Time," Advertising Age, March 2, 1987, p. 4.

2 Alsop, Ronald. "More Companies Squeeze Ads Into Bargain 15-Second Spots," Wallstreet Journal, January 29, 1987.

3 Ibid, Gay.

4 Mord, Marion S. and Edith Gilson. "Shorter Units: Risk-Responsibility-Reward." Journal of Advertising Research, 25, 4 (1985): 9-19.

5 For studies related to clutter and television commercials, see Ray, Michael L. and Peter H. Webb. "Three Prescriptions for Clutter," Journal of Advertising Research, 26, 1 (1986): 69-77; Bogart, Leo and Charles Lehman. "The Case of the 30-Second Commercial." Journal of Advertising Research, 23, 1 (1983): 11-19; Krugman, Herbert E. "Television Program Interest and Commercial Interruption," Journal Of Advertising Research 23, 1 (1983): 21-23; Krugman, Herbert E. "The Measurement of Advertising Involvement." Public Opinion Quarterly, 30, 4 (1966-67): 583-596.; Ray, Michael L., and Peter H. Webb. Experimental Research on the Effects of Television Clutter: Dealing With a Difficult Media Environment. Marketing Science Institute Report No. 76-102, 1976; Webb, Peter H. and Michael L. Ray, "Effects of TV Clutter." Journal of Advertising Research, 9, 3 (1979): 7-12, and Mord, Marion S., and Edith Gilson. "Shorter Units: Risk-Responsibility-Reward." Journal of Advertising Research, 25, 4 (1985): 9-19; and MacLachlan, James and Priscilla La Barbera. "Time Compressed TV Commercials." Journal of Advertising Research, 18, 4 (1978): 11-15.

For studies related to how to use the 15-second spot, see Fabian, George S. "15-Second Commercials: The Inevitable Evolution." Journal of Advertising Research 26, 4 (1986): RC3-5; and Pfaff, Fred and Marianne Paskowski. "A 15-Second Time Bomb?" Marketing and Media Decisions, February 1986, 36-52; Parr, J. "How Often Matters, Not How Long." Forbes. August 25, 1986, 138-139.

Related to industry commentary on the impact of the 15-second spot upon creative development, see McCollum-Spielman Report, "Will Dividing Conquer." A Supplement to Journal of Advertising Research, April/May, 1985; Kessler, Felix. "Now We Pause for a "Very" Brief Message." Fortune, December 2, 1985, 75; Vamos, Mark N. "The Coming Avalance of 15-Second Ads." Business Week, February 11, 1985, 80; Andresky, Jill. "Time and Emotion Studies." Forbes , November 18, 1985, 254.

6 O'Toole, John. "Second Splits." Atlantic Monthly, June 84, 253-30.

APPENDIX I

SELECTED COMMENTS RELATED TO TRANSITION FROM
60-SECOND TO 30-SECOND TELEVISION SPOTS

"Only problem was getting clients to accept fewer copy points."
"30's force the writer to focus on a single point or idea, then dramatize."
"Spots became less emotional."
"Took the drama and the fun out, forced you to stick to the essentials."
"We had to learn to establish a 'hook' or promise much more quickly."
"Easy transition, but spots were not as clever, powerful, or creative due to loss of set-up time."
"":30's took away the opportunity to establish a mood."
"In the transition from :60's we lost a lot of space to develop an environment or emotional aura in commercials: the commercial rhythm became basically open, product information--punch line."
"It's a state of mind. Today, I find it hard to think of 60-second ideas."
"Concommitment need to simplify message and to convince client of this."

APPENDIX II

SELECTED COMMENTS RELATED TO THE OVERALL IMPACT OF THE 15-SECOND TELEVISION COMMERCIAL ON CREATIVE FORMATS AND PRODUCTION

"Possibly will be a tendency to go back to longer formats."

"It's tough to introduce a new product with a :15. Much better to use them as a reminder for existing familiar products."

"Spokesperson and 15-second demos will take over the airwaves, with client trying to cram in all product benefits in a visual 'before your eyes' demonstration or choose a genuine spokesperson in the target audience to evoke trust and dependability."

"Symbolism, single sales point, or imagery statement, more simplicity, fewer talking heads, more new ideas along the lines of Max Headroom and real 'character' characters such as now appear in TV shows like Hill, Vice, Moonlighting..."

"I think clients will continue wanting 30's with increasing requests for 15-second lifts...just one more advertising challenge."

"Single-minded and directness in both image and idea will be of increased importance. A pungent image illustrating a highly disciplined idea/positioning works best."

"Simplicity, single-mindedness in concept and executions."

"With any luck, the 15-second spot will become more an expanded 10-second than a shrunk 30-second with clear emphasis on a single key point. At the moment, we're trying to pack all the information of a 30 in half the time...to save production money. It's a bit of a hybrid as a result."

"It will be more and more difficult to develop 'creative', entertaining, non-hardsell advertising."

"There will probably be greater use of computer and video magic generated spots which will avoid any live shooting."

"Major changes will not be in production or format, but in concept and client education as to how much can be covered in :15. Your survey omits the most important function of advertising: the idea. Production

APPENDIX II

CONTINUED:

is mere execution."
"15-second spots will be more like outdoor billboard signs or posters."
"Overall, the :15 will make our job harder. We will have to be more concise."
"The use of strongly irrational cutting will grow. Percentage of time product or corporate logo takes in each spot will increase."
"Noise level will rise in the scramble to break the double clutter. Intrusiveness will become a critical issue, empathy will become less important and less attainable. Tune out may rise among people sitting through eight messages in a two-minute break."
"15-second spots will require 15-second messages. Each idea will determine its own best format."
"I would like to see more tape production."
"Dramatic visuals and sound tracks."
"The only changes I see will be 1. simplification 2. possible format changes 3. more graphics, ie. visual messages, words or pictures."
"More time and money used to develop techniques that work in shorter time. More spent on music, effects, editing."
"You cannot expect a change in format from :30 to :15. The main thrust of good effective commercials will be the concept behind them.
"The advent of 15's threaten creativity and advertising effectiveness as nothing has done before. I do not believe, however, 15's will be prevalent."
"The changes you indicate above or which we worry about now may not be as major as we think of them now."